

strategy

Canadian Marketers' AI Readiness Report

2026 Edition

How far Canada's marketing profession has come on AI since early 2025, and where the next capability gains are waiting.

A Baseline for an Industry in Motion

As artificial intelligence reshapes how organizations operate, compete, and create value, leaders across every function are being asked to rethink strategy, redesign teams, and build AI-native capabilities and cultures. Marketing sits closer to that shift than almost any other discipline.

That's why the **Canadian Marketing Association (CMA)** and **strategy** partnered with **Twenty44** to run its **AI/44 Workforce Assessment** among Canadian marketing professionals, producing a benchmark of the profession's real-world AI readiness and proficiency.

What we set out to learn

The assessment was designed to answer the questions that matter most to any organization navigating this transition: how well marketers actually understand generative AI concepts; how they're using it, personally and professionally; how skilled they are at getting good results out of it; whether their employers are giving them clear direction on policy and expectations; and, just as importantly, how they feel about all of it, the benefits and the concerns alike.

Who we heard from

Now in its second year, the study draws on **338 Canadian marketers** surveyed between March and April 2026, nearly two and a half times the 138 respondents in the inaugural 2025 wave. Respondents span solo operators and small, medium, and large organizations, in-house marketing teams and marketing agencies, and data was collected through Twenty44's AI-moderated survey tool.

Where this report compares 2026 results to 2025, it is tracking the same questions asked of a comparable population a year earlier. Where it compares results to the "Average Knowledge Worker," it draws on Twenty44's broader AI/44 index benchmark across industries, a way of showing how marketers stack up beyond their own profession as leaders in technological adoption.

Four Pillars of AI Readiness

Every respondent's responses were scored across four pillars, which combine into a single Overall AI/44 Workforce Assessment Individual Score referenced throughout this report.

AI Openness

Gauge the cultural climate and psychological readiness for AI.

Testing for: general optimism vs. "AI anxiety," and whether the pace of change feels sustainable or overwhelming.

AI Knowledge & Skills

Baseline technical proficiency and training gaps.

Testing for: prompting competency and critical AI literacy, spotting hallucinations, and troubleshooting poor output.

Ability to Apply AI

Maps where AI is already delivering value, and where it isn't yet.

Testing for: high-value use cases already working, and untapped opportunities to solve real bottlenecks.

AI Risk & Ethics Awareness

Exposure to data privacy, bias, and security risk.

Testing for: knowledge of the "red lines" (e.g. uploading sensitive data) and awareness of internal governance and policy.

In this report

- 1 The 2026 Scorecard Is In, the overall score movement and what's driving it
- 2 Where AI Is Already Paying Off, the year's biggest gain: adoption, depth, and organizational impact
- 3 Shadow AI Down Sharply, policy and training catching up fast
- 4 Closing the Skills Gap, prompting skills and where marketers already see the upside
- 5 The One to Watch, AI openness, and the specific, addressable reasons behind it
- 6 The Size Divide, how readiness differs by company size
- 7 Where This Leaves Us, recommendations for the year ahead

01

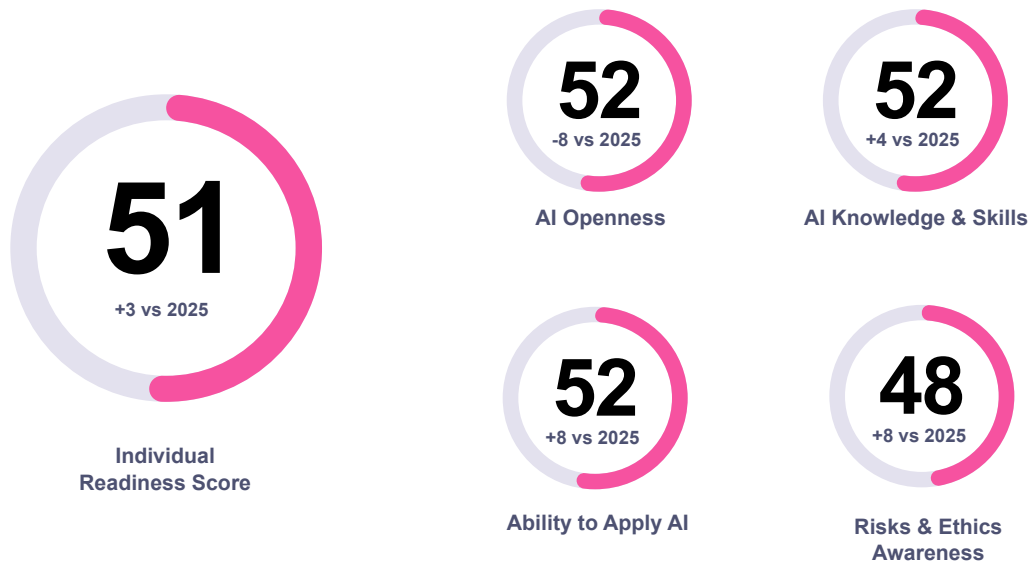
The 2026 Scorecard is in.

AI/44 WORKFORCE ASSESSMENT

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Three Pillars Up, Openness is Down

Canadian marketers' Overall AI/44 Workforce Assessment Score* climbed to 51 in 2026, up three points from 48, powered by real gains in three of the four pillars that make up the score. The fourth, AI Openness, dipped, which offers a clear signal of where to focus next.



*All AI/44 Workforce Assessment scores shown are out of 100.

This year's Overall AI/44 Workforce Assessment Score shows measurable progress, though significant opportunities for improvement remain, particularly in AI Openness and advanced skill adoption.

AI Openness saw a significant eight-point decline to 52. This signals that while usage and skill are climbing, marketer anxiety is rising too, making change management and clear leadership communication critical priorities for the year ahead, and the focus of Chapter Five.

02

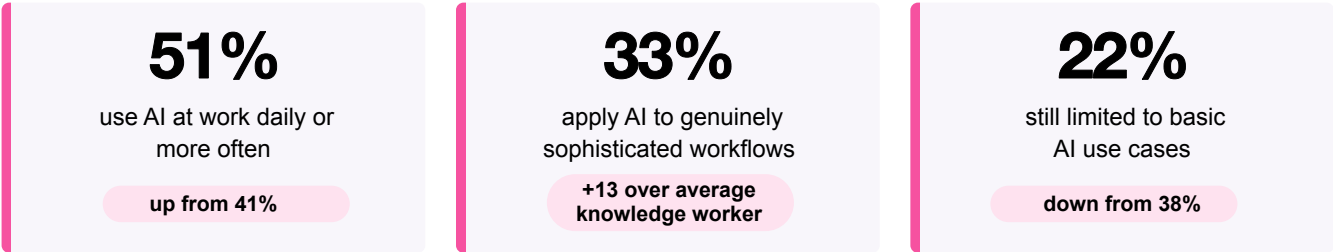
Where AI Is Already Paying Off

ABILITY TO APPLY AI

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The Biggest Gain of all Pillars in the Report

Ability to Apply AI posted the largest year-over-year gain of any pillar, rising eight points to 52. The increase strongly demonstrates that adoption is increasing and some marketers are developing more sophisticated uses. The overall score indicates that there is significant room for growth in applying AI effectively.



Depth of usage is climbing fast: the share of marketers reporting only "basic" use cases, search, proofing, simple writing, fell from **38 per cent** to **22 per cent** in a single year, while genuinely advanced use (automation, complex analysis, code) grew from **19 per cent** to **29 per cent**. Marketers can also name more distinct AI use cases unaided than they could a year ago, and more than the average knowledge worker, a sign this is becoming second nature, not a novelty.

What that usage is already delivering

"Time savings and efficiency" (**66 per cent**) and "increased productivity" (**45 per cent**) are where marketers see AI paying off most for their organization today, with roughly a quarter already crediting it with freeing them up for more strategic work. There's still real headroom to capture: about one in five say the organizational impact is still taking shape, the clearest sign of where the next round of gains will come from.

WHAT MARKETERS USE AI FOR AT WORK	CDN MARKETERS	DIFF	AVG. KNOWLEDGE WORKER
Writing / editing content	72%	+1pt	71%
Research & information gathering	64%	-4pt	68%
Brainstorming & ideation	58%	+11pt	47%
Summarizing docs / meetings	60%	+14pt	46%
Data analysis & visualization	42%	+13pt	29%

On several fronts, ideation, summarizing, data analysis, Canadian marketers are already ahead of the average knowledge worker. The next unlock is hands-on coaching that shows marketers exactly how AI fits their real workflows, turning today's early wins into everyday habits.

03

Shadow AI Down Sharply

AWARENESS OF AI RISKS & ETHICS

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Shadow AI Down — Here's What's Left to Close

Risk & Ethics Awareness rose eight points to 48, tied for the largest gain of any pillar, the clearest sign that Canadian marketers, and their employers, have gotten far more deliberate about how AI gets used.

Free personal AI accounts at work are down from 56 per cent to 33 per cent, but still represents a substantial data security risk.

While the use of unauthorized personal AI accounts dropped year-over-year, one-third of Canadian marketers still rely on them, signalling an ongoing governance risk for organizations.

Company-issued accounts are now the norm (**63 per cent**, up from **49 per cent**); custom company AI tools have more than tripled in reach (**24 per cent**, up from **7 per cent**).

That shift shows up in how marketers think about risk, too. More marketers are naming accuracy, job impact, and originality as things worth watching than they did last year, a sign of a more informed, more discerning user base, not a more fearful one. Outside their own employer, marketers lean most on technology vendors (**31.5 per cent**) and academic or research institutions (**26.2 per cent**) for ethical guidance, with real reliance on the CMA's own AI Playbooks and guide for marketers as well.

Policy and training are catching up fast

Thirty-five per cent of marketers now call their company's AI policy "very clear", **up from 26 per cent** in 2025. The next milestone: the **29 per cent** who still say it's unclear or that no policy exists at all.

The share rating their company's AI training "very effective" **doubled to 24 per cent**, and the share receiving no training at all fell by more than a third, from **38 per cent** to **24 per cent**.

Where training lands well, marketers are consistent about why: hands-on practice and real examples (**44 per cent**, the top-rated factor), clear guidelines and guardrails (**33 per cent**), and practical, job-specific use cases (**32 per cent**), a clear playbook for closing the rest of the gap

04

Closing the Skills Gap

KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

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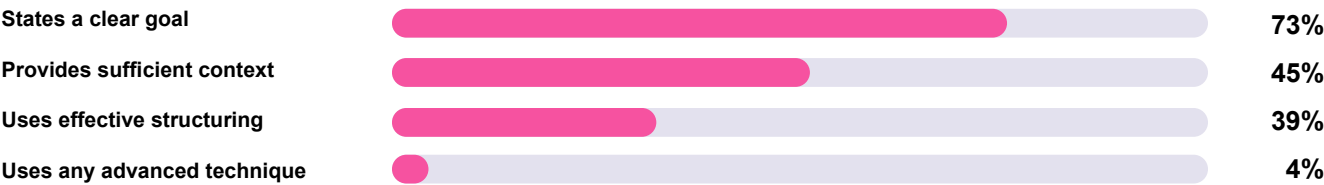
The Single Biggest Growth Lever

While Knowledge and Skills increased slightly, Canadian marketers' prompting proficiency sits at 3.7 out of 10, highlighting a critical need for professional growth.

Prompting proficiency already outpaces the average knowledge worker, offers a clear runway toward technical mastery.

Average score: 3.7 out of 10, versus 3.54 for the average knowledge worker.

Asked to show exactly how they'd prompt for a specific task, marketers show where the next opportunities lie:



Advanced techniques include iteration, constraints, execution instructions, and asking for options.

Nearly three-quarters of marketers can already state a clear goal when prompting AI. The next step, sufficient context, real structure, and advanced techniques like iteration and constraints, is exactly the kind of skill that's fast to teach and immediately useful, which is why Twenty44 sees this as the single highest-leverage investment available to the profession right now.

Where marketers already see the upside

PERCEIVED BENEFIT OF AI	2025	2026
Efficiency & time savings	68%	77%
Task automation & streamlining	52%	53%
Enhanced content creation	45%	47%
Improved data analysis & insights	38%	42%

Each benefit category saw some year-over-year growth, suggesting that marketers' confidence in AI's practical value is gradually increasing, though some gains were modest and there remain areas where impact could be scaled even further.

05

The One to Watch

AI OPENNESS

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Optimism Still Leads — Here's What to Watch

Each benefit category saw some year-over-year growth, suggesting that marketers' confidence in AI's practical value is gradually increasing, though some gains were modest and there remain areas where impact could be strengthened.

The majority of marketers still expect AI to make society better.

Most marketers (**63 per cent**) expect AI to make society better. However, the share expecting it to get "much worse" grew from **3 per cent** to **9 per cent**, a specific, trackable shift, not a broad reversal. (About 1 in 4 now expect some negative impact, up from **14 per cent** in 2025.)

It's personal, too: marketers are somewhat more likely than last year to expect AI to affect their own life negatively. The throughline across both findings isn't rejection of AI, it's a request for more visible support through the transition.

From "thrilled" to "cautiously optimistic"

"Cautiously optimistic" is still the largest single group and held steady year over year. What moved is the extremes: fewer marketers describe themselves as "absolutely thrilled," and more sit in "somewhat worried" or "very concerned", a maturing, more realistic relationship with the technology as it becomes part of daily work.

The pace of change is a real, addressable factor

Fourteen per cent of marketers now say the pace of technological change at work is "way too fast." This is worth naming directly, since marketers are **3.5 times** more likely than the average knowledge worker to feel that way, given their position on the frontlines of digital adoption. Most still say they can handle it. Treating AI adoption as change management, clear communication, hands-on support, realistic pacing, is the direct answer to this chapter, and it's exactly where Chapter Seven picks up.

06

The Size Divide

READINESS BY COMPANY SIZE

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Navigating Structural Variations

The topline numbers mask a real divide in how AI readiness shows up at a two-person shop versus a 50,000–employee enterprise, and a proven playbook already exists for closing it.

- 1 Access. Solo operators lean on free personal accounts (**46.7 per cent**); enterprises (**50,000+**) lead with company-issued accounts (**75.0 per cent**); large firms (**10K–50K**) have the highest custom-tool adoption (**23.1 per cent**).
- 2 Policy clarity scales with size. About **48 per cent** of enterprise respondents call their AI policy "very clear," versus **21.0 per cent** at small companies (**51–250**), and only **2.1 per cent** of enterprise respondents report no policy at all, versus **18.5 per cent** at small firms.
- 3 The training gap sits in the middle. Mid-small companies (**251–1,000**) report the highest rate of "no training" (**41.2 per cent**), while enterprises are most effective at delivering it (**62.5 per cent** rate their training "somewhat" or "very" effective).
- 4 Leadership communication is most mixed at large firms (**10K–50K**): **21.3 per cent** say leadership communicates "very well," but an equal **21.3 per cent** say "not very well." Enterprises fare best overall (**34.6 per cent** "very well").
- 5 Solo operators feel the pace hardest, **20 per cent** say it's "way too fast," roughly double the enterprise rate (**10.4 per cent**), despite using AI at work more frequently than almost anyone else.
- 6 Safe space to experiment is most available at large firms (**10K–50K**, **91.2 per cent**) and least available at mid-small firms (**251–1,000**, **44.6 per cent**).

The pattern is consistent: the biggest organizations have already built the clearest guardrails and the most effective training, a proven playbook that smaller and mid-sized firms can now follow, for a quicker and effective path to AI adoption.

07

Where This Leaves Us

RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

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Four Recommendations for the Year Ahead

Our findings across the four pillars drive four recommendations designed to capitalize on the consistent gains seen in three areas and take targeted action on the fourth.

- 1 Coach the prompt, not just the tool. With **96 per cent** of marketers using no advanced prompting technique yet, better fundamentals, context, structure, iteration, are the single highest-leverage investment available to immediately elevate team output.
- 2 Close the policy gap where it's widest. Small and mid-sized organizations have the most room to close the gap with enterprises on clarity and training, the fastest remaining way to shrink residual shadow AI use.
- 3 Treat this as change management, not tooling. AI Openness is the one pillar still catching up, meeting rising questions about jobs, accuracy, and creativity head-on, with visible support, is what closes that gap fastest.
- 4 Make training hands-on and specific. Marketers consistently rate practical, department-specific, example-driven coaching as what actually works; it's the clearest lever available for turning this year's gains into next year's.

Implementing these recommendations gives Canadian marketing leaders the operational roadmap to move from early adoption to sustainable, team-wide mastery.

Thank You

This report was produced by Twenty44 using its AI/44 Workforce Assessment, in partnership with the Canadian Marketing Association and Strategy, with additional sample provided by Sago.



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